

CRITICAL THEORY

**"WASHING ONE'S HANDS OF THE CONFLICT
BETWEEN THE POWERFUL AND THE
POWERLESS MEANS TO SIDE WITH THE
POWERFUL, NOT TO BE NEUTRAL."**



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2007

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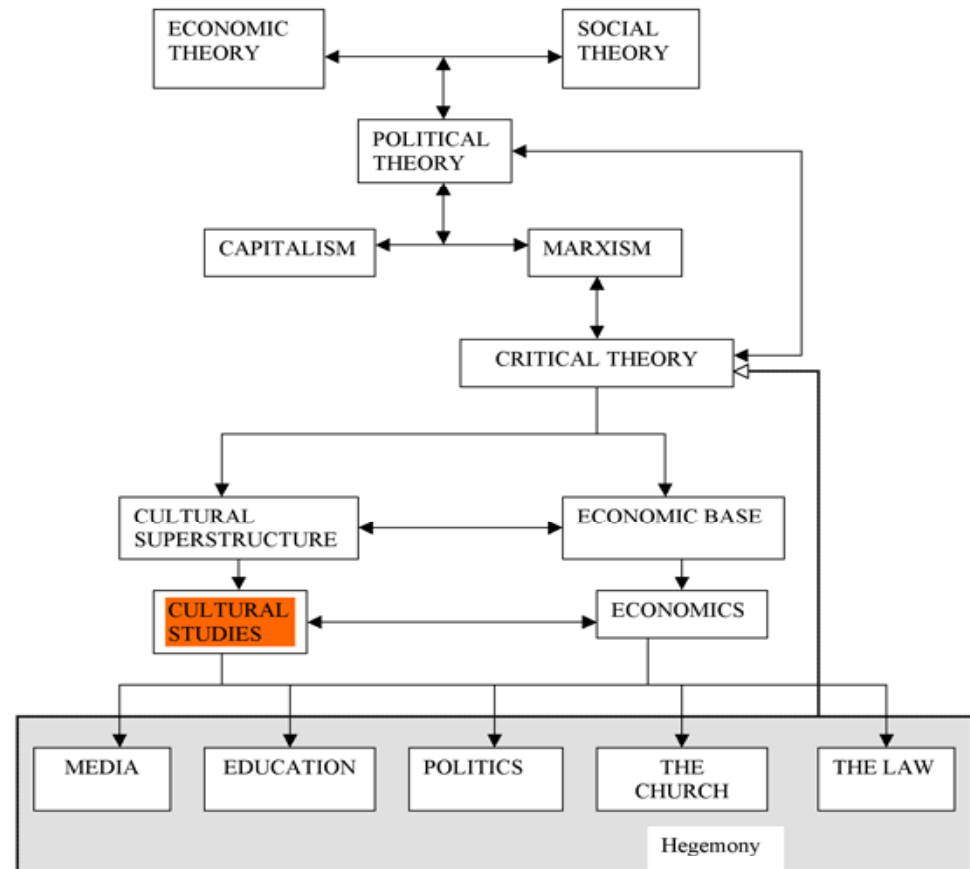
Critical Education Theory is part of a broader theory called *Critical Theory*. *Critical Theory* is socio-political theory developed in Germany in the 1930s in response to the rise of Fascism. It sought to explain the failure of Marxism to bring about a social revolution. It challenges received notions of reality, seeking to demonstrate the ways in which our conceptions are socially constructed. Critical Theory is *reflexive* that is, it is aware that the “reality” that we experience “out there” does not exist independently of ideology, but that it is shaped (along with our perceptions of it) by forces of power and *hegemony* that have a human agency. These forces continually try to control all the means of shaping society and its belief system - Education, the Media, Religion, the Law, The Church, Planning Regulations, the Economy etc. They do so to reproduce their own version of reality, their own economic, social and cultural supremacy - their hegemony. Critical Theory views all beliefs, realities, values etc. in their social and economic context and asks, “who stands to gain from society seeing things this way? It then looks to discover how the beneficiaries of the system have created the system to benefit themselves at the expense of others



WHAKAPAPA

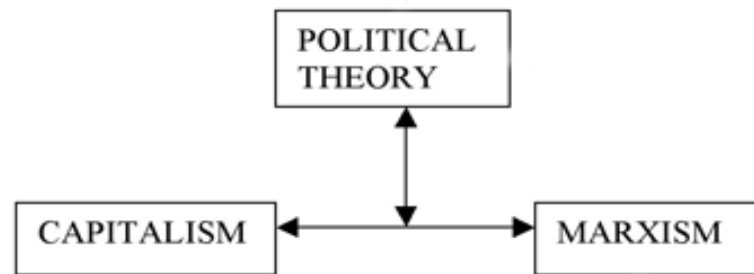
Critical Theory evolves from the wider discipline of Social Theory, and looks at the ways in which political ideology shapes experienced reality as a way of maintaining existing regimes of privilege and social control. It casts a critical eye upon History, Philosophy, Education, the Media, the Law, the Church and Politics and all of the instruments and vehicles which shape the way we see things. It holds that these instruments of social control are themselves shaped by the ideologies and power structures of Capitalism, and that their purpose is to reproduce these conditions in ways which benefit the already-powerful. Instead, Critical Theory promotes a counter-ideology which sees these agencies as potential vehicles for social liberation and transformation and as a means of attaining social, cultural, and economic equity. Initially, it did this from an orthodox (economic) Marxist point of view, but increasingly has adopted many of the tenets and theories of Cultural Studies to demonstrate how *control over culture* has come to play a fundamental part in sustaining the power status quo.

CRITICAL THEORY



POLITICAL THEORY

Since the 19th Century, political theorising has been polarised between two different interpretations of historical development: Capitalism and Marxism. The one sees the development of a free market of exchange based upon competition between individual producers as the basis of rational economic development. The other sees such competition as essentially wasteful of resources and see the only rational future to be based upon economic and social co-operation and collective ownership.



That form of economic social activity in which the means of production is not owned by the producers or workers themselves but by a small group of others (shareholders) who take the profit from the production process that ought to go to the workers. Marx maintained that this system contained inherent contradictions and class conflicts that would ultimately cause its fall and replacement by Communism. What Marx did not anticipate, was the ability of Capitalism to shape its own cultural support system.

The 19th Century political and economic theory of economist and philosopher Karl Marx who predicted the fall of Capitalism and the ownership of the means of production by the workers, based upon the fact that the Capitalist system is socially unstable. Marx predicted a Socialist Revolution. In 1917, people believed that this had arrived with the Russian Revolution. But this failed to become universal and eventually collapsed. Critical Theory began by trying to understand and theorise this failure.

CAPITALISM

Marx believed that Capitalism was basically exploitative since the wages the workers get can never allow them to fully afford the things they produce. This is because the surplus value that they create is taken by those who own the “means of production”. He held that until the workers themselves owned the means of production, the exploitation would continue, and so would the social relations that they engender. With the Russian revolution of 1917, Socialists believed that the world-wide revolution that Marx had predicted had arrived. But in the Soviet Union, the workers did now have direct ownership of the means of production. That was held by the State, and the workers remained economic slaves to the State system. Many believe that this is why the Communist State failed. Critical Theory was born out of the recognition of that failure, and attempted to theorise how the application of Marx’s original theory had been flawed. Marx had called the Capitalist System the *Economic Base* (or foundation), and the social relations that they produce the *Cultural Superstructure*. He theorised that the economic base *determined* all social and cultural (superstructure) relations and that culture had a very limited capacity to bring about social change.



"If they finish before noon, we won't have to give them lunch."

SOCIALISM

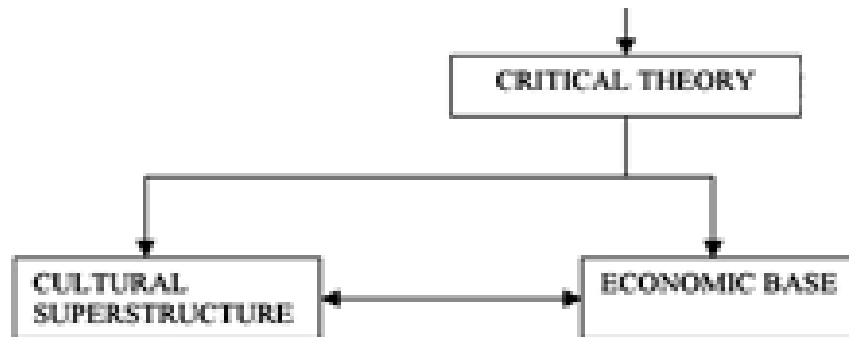
Contesting the ideology of Capitalism, is the counter-ideology of Communism or Socialism. Socialism is founded upon a very different view of the human condition than Capitalism. It rejects deterministic notions of History, Human Nature and other ideologies that suggest there to be an inevitable struggle between competitive individuals. Instead, it suggests that competition is a condition brought about by a scarcity of resources. People only compete because they believe there is not enough to go around. In fact, Socialists maintain, the World contains enough resources for everybody to live with a high standard of living. The problem is that the resources that do exist are not evenly distributed among all of the people on the planet. In this model, the rich are rich only by creating the conditions by which the poor remain poor.

Women
constitute **half** the world's
population,
perform nearly **two-thirds**
of its work hours,
receive **one-tenth** of the world's income
and own less than **one-hundredth**
of the world's property.

United Nations Report, 1980

BASE-SUPERSTRUCTURE

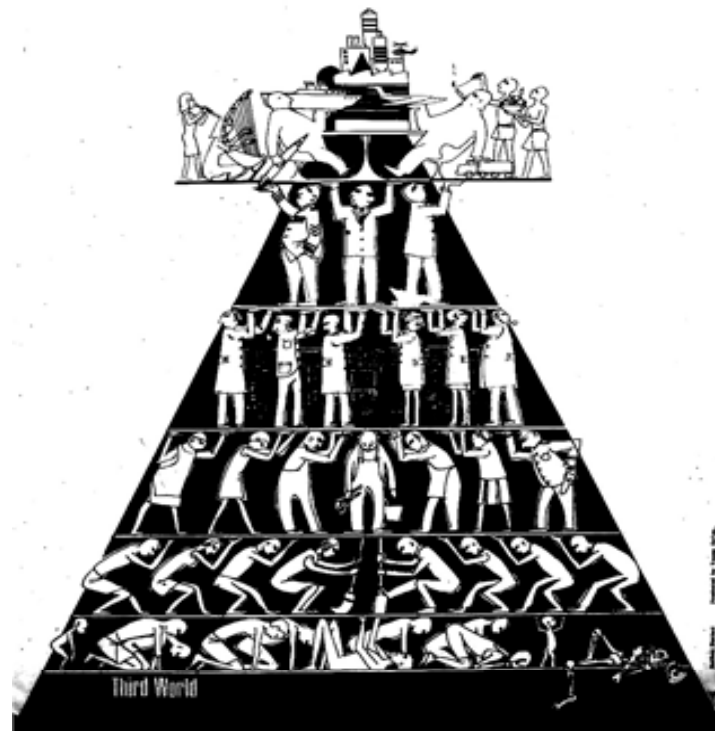
Marx had theorised that all social and cultural circumstances were *determined* by the economic circumstances in which they occur, and that it was largely impossible to bring about significant economic (or structural) change by peaceful means. This was why he predicted that real change could only happen through armed revolution (as happened in Russia). He characterised the Economy as the *Base* of all social relations, and the social relations themselves as the *Superstructure*. His theory involved a contradiction, however. It wasn't clear from his theory how one could change society to the point where armed insurrection was acceptable to the masses without first changing the Economic Base, but he himself suggested that this was not possible. Critical Theory, in its critique of Marxism, suggested instead that Culture was itself a very powerful agent for social and therefore economic change. Hence it was, in the 1960s, that Critical Theorising gave rise in Birmingham, England to the development of the field of *Cultural Studies*.



EQUITY

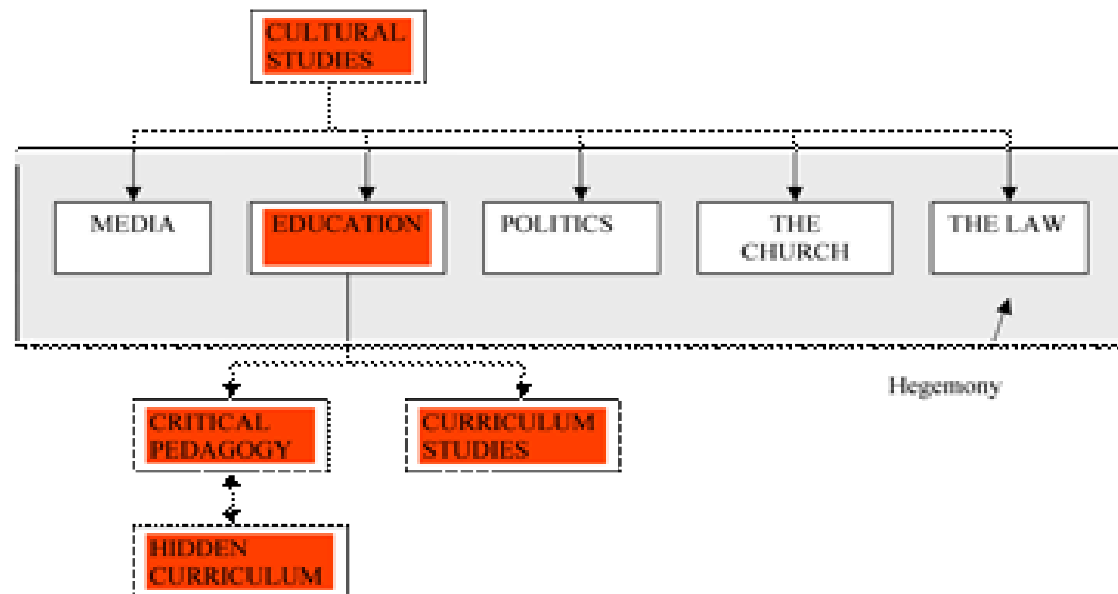
Critical Theory is therefore based upon achieving economic, political and cultural freedom for all people by interrogating how the rules and structures that govern society are designed by the powerful to maintain their privilege and power. It needs to be asked at this point why Indigenous peoples should give any credence to what is, after all, another of the coloniser's models of how things should work. Isn't Critical Theory just another version of the old philosophy of "we know what's best for you!"? There is some reason to believe that this might be so, because Critical Theory uses very big words and a relatively private and complicated language to explain itself - making it difficult for any but the intellectual elite to understand. But having said that, it also needs to be said that one of the cornerstones of Critical Theory is the struggle to achieve the ability and freedom for people to determine their own lives, their own cultures and their own economies - in Maori, *Tinorangatiratanga*. Whereas in all previous theories of social change, *Cultural* issues were made subordinate to *Class* issues, in Critical Theory they are central. Critical Theory does not advocate that we wait for freedom for all workers *before* self-determination can happen. It suggests that the struggle for self-determination is ongoing and everyday and it offers models about how to understand the workings of oppression.

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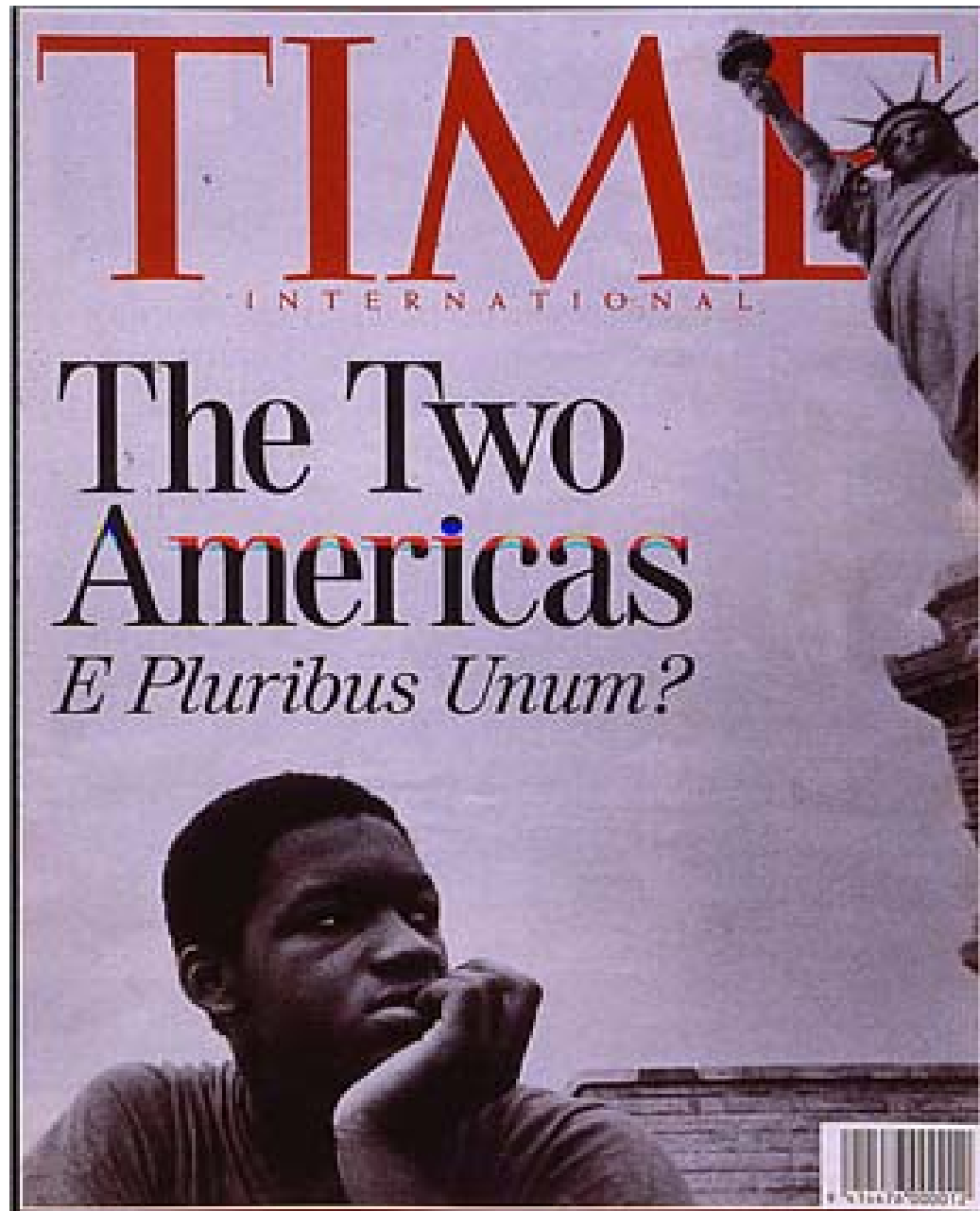
CULTURAL STUDIES

Marx had based all of his theorising on issues of *Class* difference, which tended to overlook or negate important class differences that occurred on the basis of or alongside of issues of *Race* or *Gender*, with all of the multiple layerings of meaning and experience with which these are associated. At the University of Birmingham in the 1960s, British/West Indian Professor Stuart Hall and a group of Critical Theorists established the Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies. The mission of the Centre was to analyse all of the instruments or agencies of cultural production - the Media, the Schools, The Legal System, the Churches, the Parliamentary system etc., operate to reproduce the power relations in society through the reproduction of dominant cultural views and values. Their work took place in the context of a Cultural revolution that was emerging in Britain, where the irreverent pronouncements and music of the working class Beatles and images of Coronation Street were beginning to challenge middle class norms, images and values.



CULTURAL POLITICS

In society there are many different cultural groupings. Under the system of representative democracy, the *majority* generally determine the rules and regulations that govern behaviour. Each cultural group must struggle to persuade the majority of the value and importance of its viewpoint, to achieve *hegemony*. But all groups must struggle to do this. They therefore have to compete with each other to influence public thinking. The power to do this is not evenly spread. Some groups have more power than others to influence public opinion. In Critical Theory, this group is called the *Dominant Culture*. As Marx said, "The ideas of the ruling class are in every epoch the ruling ideas; i.e., the class, which is the ruling material force of society, is at the same time its ruling intellectual force. The class which has the means of material production at its disposal, has control at the same time over the means of mental production". In other words the dominant culture in any society is the one which has the most power to ensure its hegemony. It does this through establishing its own values as *the* values, as *normal*.



HEGEMONY

By controlling everyday public assumptions about the meaning of key concepts, it becomes possible to shape that everyday reality itself to specific ends. The public belief in an essential “human nature” renders attempts to achieve a peaceful and just society, obsolete by definition. The predominance of the ideology of a “human nature” is aimed precisely at the prevention of social change by suggesting that real change is impossible - all the unacceptable things that exist - greed, cruelty etc are just part of “human nature” and can’t be changed. So we may as well not try. The purpose of this is to maintain those existing power relationships that are exactly the cause of the problem in the first place. The ideology of “human nature” is diametrically opposed to the ideology of social change. In this world of competing ideologies, those people or groups that have the most power are also the ones who are best able to influence public opinion. This is called *hegemony*. Hegemony is the



process by which the disempowered are persuaded to participate in their own disempowerment. From Gramsci's point of view, the armed repression of the state represented the *failure* of the dominant culture to achieve *hegemony*. Hegemony, in this sense, he defined as the process embodied in the ability of the State to create in its citizens a particular moral and ethical attitude corresponding to that espoused by the ruling elite, and thereby to have the mass of the population acquiesce to their own domination. In today's world, this serves the interests of Global Capitalism through the creation of a “Free Market” the purpose of which is to create an unlimited supply of cheap labour to support industrial development by large multi-national companies. Although they are not elected, these companies hold enormous power over national economies and over the lives of ordinary workers, forcing governments to ease labour laws, reduce wages, suppress unions, reduce taxes and provide infrastructure services.

HUMAN NATURE

It seems as though competition, individualism, passivity and hierarchy are part of *Human Nature*, but this is an illusion. Critical Theory holds that there is no such thing as *Human Nature* that is separate from the conditions in which it exists. All behaviour is shaped by the circumstances in which it exists. Lobsters and crabs in a pot will attack each other, but in the wild they exhibit very different behaviour. In the human world, “human nature” is a term usually used to describe the “worst” aspects of behaviour - greed, aggression etc. We seldom use the term to describe love or empathy. This should alert us to the ideological basis of the term. Marx suggested that in our modern world, all social relations are determined by the circumstances of Capitalism under which we live, and that in order to have a more loving, just and equitable world we would need to abandon Capitalism.

To call something part of “human nature” is to suggest that it is impossible to change it. The social construction of a belief in “human nature” leads to passivity and acquiescence in the face of power, because it appears hopeless and futile to try to change something that is so unchangeable. A belief in “human nature” is designed to keep things the way they are.



HISTORY

The accepted history of any nation is always the object of Critical Theorising. One very important way of maintaining hegemony and control is to have the people believe that current circumstances are the result of rational and purposeful developments that have an inescapable logic about them. It is important for people to believe that where they are situated was and is inevitable, because this presumed inevitability carries through to influence their future behaviours, and at the same time legitimates any control measures that the already-powerful may impose to maintain their power.



George Orwell once wrote: **“Who controls the past controls the future. Who controls the present controls the past”**. The idea that the past, which is *gone*, can be controlled, sounds paradoxical. We presume that the past was a particular way, that it happened in a particular order, and that events were related in specific causative relations. What Orwell meant, I think, is that we continually rewrite history to make sense of the present, and to give us some sense of where we are progressing into the future, but that the ability to rewrite the story of the past is not evenly distributed. Some people have more power to do so than others. History is invariably written by the “winners” in the struggle for hegemony, and they invariably write it to characterise themselves as fair and honourable rather than oppressive and/or genocidal

CULTURAL CAPITAL

In the struggle for *hegemony* between cultures, some cultures have values that are more highly valued than others in society in general. In most western societies, for instance, ballet, opera and fine art have high status, while *rap*, *tagging* and *break-dancing* have less. These high-status cultural values are referred to as *cultural capital*. Cultural capital works just like economic capital: the more wealth you have, the easier it is to make even more. In addition, the high value of high cultural capital activities (like art) is created and maintained through a system of socially-created *scarcity*. Based on the laws of supply and demand, the scarcer a commodity, the more valuable it is.

The high cultural capital values associated with dominant culture activities (like fine art) operate through a system of scarcity which is built upon *cultural codes*. It is important to maintain the value of a particular kind of knowledge by making access to its codes difficult. In order to break or read the codes of fine art, it is necessary to understand the language system in which the codes exist. These esoteric language systems are jealously guarded, and form part of the training of elite education systems which are inaccessible to most people.



COLONISATION

A belief in the inherent superiority in a particular set of cultural codes has always been the basis for Colonisation and Colonialism. The American colonisation of the West, and the dispossession of its indigenous peoples was carried out under the ideology of *Manifest Destiny*. Europeans believed that they had a superior culture, and that it was their God-given destiny to occupy the land and to extinguish the culture of its original inhabitants. In this illustration, we see Liberty leading the settlers across the prairie, Bible in hand, stringing telegraph wires with the other, while the “savages” flee ahead. This White Supremacist belief system, coupled with its spiritual justification - Christianity - was the basis of every genocidal act in the Americas from the discovery by Columbus in 1494 down to the present.



Its purpose was the acquisition of resources, (land, precious metals and slaves) to fuel emerging capitalist production and capital accumulation. Christianity became the main vehicle by which European values were imposed upon indigenous peoples. Its imposition - through Education was both subtle and devastating. Linda Tuhiwai Smith, a Maori scholar suggests that schools were placed in Maori communities like Trojan Horses - to destroy the less visible aspects of Maori life, through the imposition their cosmologies and ideologies. In other words, the semantic structures of the colonisers have infiltrated into and replaced over time those of the colonised. Most significant of these structures has been the Enlightenment notion of *rationality*. It's consequence for the colonised, as Fanon suggested, has been the most odious form of colonisation, and that which has brought with it the greatest pain for the colonised - the colonisation of the mind - so that they have come to disbelieve and reject the most sacred precepts of their own traditional cultures and therefore their identities. The late African American writer James Baldwin summed up this experience succinctly, when he said that he "despised" black people, "possibly because they failed to produce Rembrandt."

RATIONALITY

The late Black American writer, James Baldwin once wisely noted that the most odious form of colonisation was “the colonisation of the mind”, because once the mind has been colonised, once the seeds of cultural self-doubt have been sown by the coloniser, *all further experience* then becomes both colonised and colonising. The imposition of Western European forms of rationality upon indigenous peoples has largely resulted in the worldwide and uniform colonisation of their mental processes. Rational discourse now permeates every sector of every culture on the planet, displacing indigenous modes of perception and experience. Yet rational discourse also plays an important role in the development of a theoretical position with respect to issues of social change and emancipation. The confusion occurs because positivist form of rationalism - that which evolved from the Enlightenment and which relies upon objective, measurable verification - has become so invasive over the last two centuries that we tend to assume that it is the only form of rationality. On the contrary rationality is an inherently human trait. Rational thought clearly predates the Seventeenth and Eighteenth centuries. It is an integral aspect of human life - an aspect of life which clearly has survival value. Henry Giroux has made a valuable contribution to our understanding of rationality by distinguishing some forms of rationality which do not address particular kinds of questions. This analytic helps Giroux to identify three main streams of rationalist thought, and to clarify much of the confusion which surrounds the conservative and the emancipatory moments of postmodern theorising:

1. Technical rationality
2. Hermeneutic rationality
3. Emancipatory rationality.

What distinguishes the three modes is the way in which they selectively apply themselves to the social issues which they confront. Each carries different social, cultural and political imperatives, which have a markedly different effect upon both the discourse on rationality itself and on the results of their different applications. Here (right) at the University of California Berkeley Campus, in 1968 we see two forms of rationality in direct confrontation.



Berkeley Professors try to reason with National Guardsmen: Peoples Park (1968)

TECHNICAL RATIONALITY

Technical rationality is linked to principles of control, and addresses the world through processes of objectification and control, using the natural sciences as its model of development. Technical rationality is that form of cognition which I have outlined extensively above - that which is normatively taken as "scientific". Technical rationality presumes that there is an objective world "out there" and that the job of rationalism is to employ all of the technical means at our disposal to uncover and explain it. It suggests a unitary form of "real" knowledge of that world (ie. knowledge which most accurately describes it). This knowledge is seen as "value free", uncontaminated by either personal idiosyncratic perception or ideological dogma, and is seen to develop in a linear fashion, aligned to conceptions of history that are "progressive" (ie. that view the human story as one of continuing progress.) What gives (scientific) technical rationality its colonising power is its very *impersonality*. Science presumes to view the world from everywhere at the same time and from no single particular personal perspective at all. The scientific position is *position-less*. Its impersonality lends to science a reciprocating aura of personal, social and cultural neutrality which transcends both geographical and cultural boundaries and in the process delegitimises these boundaries *as boundaries*.

Science as it is currently practiced thus gains its own legitimacy only through the erasure of the legitimacies of other views of reality, and it is in this sense that I refer to it as an instrument of colonisation



This Smithsonian Institute image of Liberty, moving West across the Great Plains, stringing telegraph wires, book (Bible?) in hand, and leading settlers, stagecoaches and trains after the fleeing Indians

HERMENEUTIC RATIONALITY

In contrast to technical rationality, Giroux characterises hermeneutic rationality as a cognitive form which does not take as its starting point a monological view of knowledge, but is founded upon a desire to understand the "communicative and symbolic patterns of interaction that shape individual and intersubjective meaning." Whereas technical rationality presumes an *a priori* world which we strive to understand, hermeneutic rationality embraces the notion that we actually *create* that world through the symbolic forms of communication and understanding which shape our perceptions. Hermeneutic rationality has much in common with phenomenology, since it links the issue of human agency into the creation of social reality, recognising the importance of intentionality, appropriation and intersubjectivity in the perception and creation of the social world. In hermeneutic rationality, human beings are characterised not as passive recipients, but as active agents in the production of meaning. One of its significant achievements has been in helping to focus attention upon how particular forms of human relationships shape particular understandings and meanings, and in this respect it has helped to shed critical light upon the internal contradictions and the conservative instrumentality of technical rationality.

On the other hand, hermeneutic rationality, while describing the ways in which diverse forms of social relations affect meaning, does not address the ways in which the diverse meanings which are thus generated impinge upon each other and upon the social relations which have produced them. It avoids the notion of meaning as a site of struggle for freedom because it fails to account reflexively for its own apparent neutrality. Hermeneutic rationality corresponds to what Hal Foster has called a "postmodernism of reaction" which, while promising to lead us from the moral and ethical contradictions of technical rationality, leaves us without any moral position from which to address issues of suffering, domination or oppression

TRANSFORMATIVE RATIONALITY

On the one hand we have the logic of domination embedded in the technical rationality of science, on the other we have the logic of appeasement masquerading as liberation through the rhetoric of postmodernism while emptying social, cultural and political life of its transformative potential. Were it not for the fact that rationality has always been a part of the logic of liberation it would be tempting to abandon all attempts at social transformation, since the solidarity which must stand as the basis of the struggle against injustice requires the binding force of mutuality for its existence. If not a rationalism based upon the logic of Universal Emancipation, then what? Giroux suggests a third form of rationality which is aimed not only at reproducing and adding to our knowledge of the world as is the case with technical rationality, nor at merely critically describing the process by which we do this - as is the case with hermeneutic rationality. His third mode of rationality is grounded in a particular form of understanding of how meaning is shaped in the context of domination and struggle. It does not reject the hermeneutic understanding of how meaning is produced, but extends it by recognising the reflexive aspects of the social forces which shape that meaning to also shape our theorising of it. *Transformative* rationality seeks not just to describe the world of social relationships and of the meanings which they shape and which reflexively shape them, all the time maintaining a position of value-neutrality.

It takes instead a specific value-position with respect to these social relationships and attempts to critically theorise them with the intention of bringing about their transformation. Transformative Rationality sees the world as unjust, and it sees this injustice reproduced by asymmetrical power relationships in which the power to control and shape meaning (by also shaping the social formations which shape that meaning) is not evenly distributed throughout the whole social collective. In addition, transformative rationality locates rationality itself as an element of investigation within the process of inquiry to point to the ways in which critical analysis might contribute to the circumstances it critiques. It does this by challenging amongst other things the false dichotomy between individualism and collective creativity, and between manual and intellectual labour, as at Peoples Park, Berkeley (below)

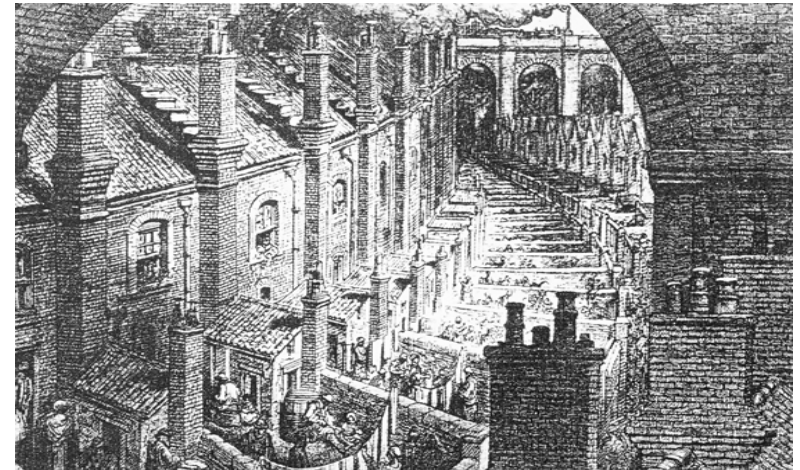


THE ENLIGHTENMENT

The discourse on *rationality* that was one of the corner stones of the Enlightenment did not take place in a social, economic or political vacuum. It progressed hand in hand with the process of colonisation and the rapid advance of Capitalism made possible by the influx of cheap resources, in both materials and bodies. The gold and silver from the Americas, coupled with the dramatic expansion of slavery made all of this possible. It's logic - the logic of control cannot be separated from its effects, most particularly the erasure of indigenous cultural experiences and identities on a global scale. The notion of *Progress* which animated capitalist expansion was the progress of an elite few. For the *colonised other* it was genocidal. In addition, those peasants dispossessed "at home" (through legalities of "Enclosure") and pressed into wage slavery were similarly if not equally decimated. The increasing legality of *private property* destroyed the collective economies and identities of cultures across the globe. This, coupled with the need to develop regimes of consumption to absorb the items of production saw a paradoxical increase in production and consumption coupled with the introduction of a regimes scarcity - intended to increase prices by making demand exceed supply. The two illustrations (right) indicate the disparities of wealth created by the 18th and 19th Century Enclosures. Mr. and Mrs. Andrews (top) enjoy (and protect) the fruits of their new-found wealth and Estate which has been acquired by the exploitation of the poor and the theft of their communal land. For the starving poor "poaching" from this newly stolen property resulted in transportation to Botany Bay (Australia).



Mr and Mrs Andrews by Gainsborough

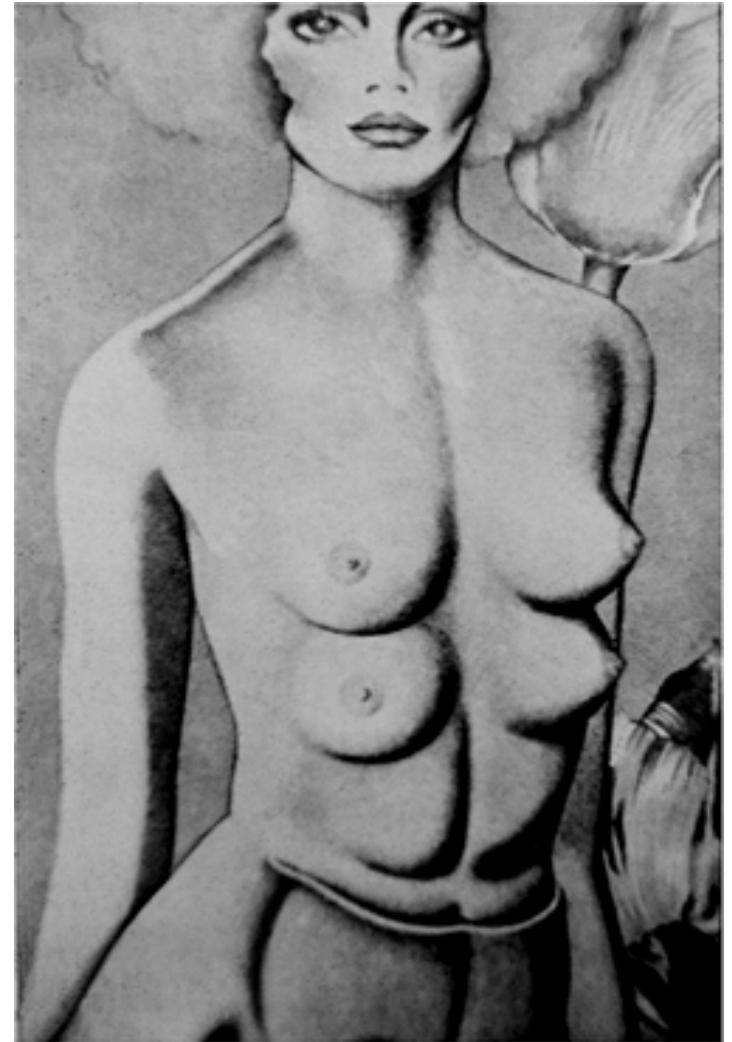


London slums by Doré

COMMODIFICATION

The economic process of Capitalism works through the extraction of surplus value from “commodities” (useful or tradable articles). Surplus value or “profit” occurs when the price of something in the open market (including the cost of raw materials and labour) greatly exceeds the cost making it. For the process to work, everything must be reduced to the same monetary value system - must be “commodified”. First of all, this requires that it be seen as a thing, that is, *as capable of ownership*. This means that it must fit the requirements of *property* ownership, as defined by the Law. The Law, as it has developed since the 16th Century has basically been shaped to define and protect the rights of *private* property.

Once a commodity has been legally defined by its property rights, through systems of title, copyright, etc. it can be traded in the marketplace as a commodity. The process of commodification therefore affects everything to do with the system of exchange. *Everything* is reduced to its monetary or exchange value - be it a designated piece of land, a space, a plant, a genetic code, or even a spiritual value. Indeed, many of the Christian churches have developed their spiritual power through a parallel development of their property and wealth. Once the commodification of something has been established, an increase in its commodity value becomes imperative for the realisation of profit. This is achieved through the creation of a condition of scarcity for the commodity, so that demand exceeds supply.



Genetically modified woman with an extra set of breasts and a marsupial pouch for more efficient child rearing

CREATING SCARCITY

The logic of technical rationality evolves, as noted, from the requirements of capitalist expansion. Higher efficiencies, reductions in costs, increases in profits etc. are all the intended results of its application. The attainment of maximum profit from the production process requires two things:

- that the cost of labour be minimised through the existence of a large pool of unemployed, vying for jobs at low wages.
- the creation of desire, to ensure that demand exceeds supply.

Both have been basic principles of capitalist development for three hundred years, but in the last twenty years (often called “The Age of Consumption”) that development has accelerated through a concerted move towards globalisation, which is intended to provide at the same time, both cheap labour, and a market for consumption.



Dallas Food Line, 1987

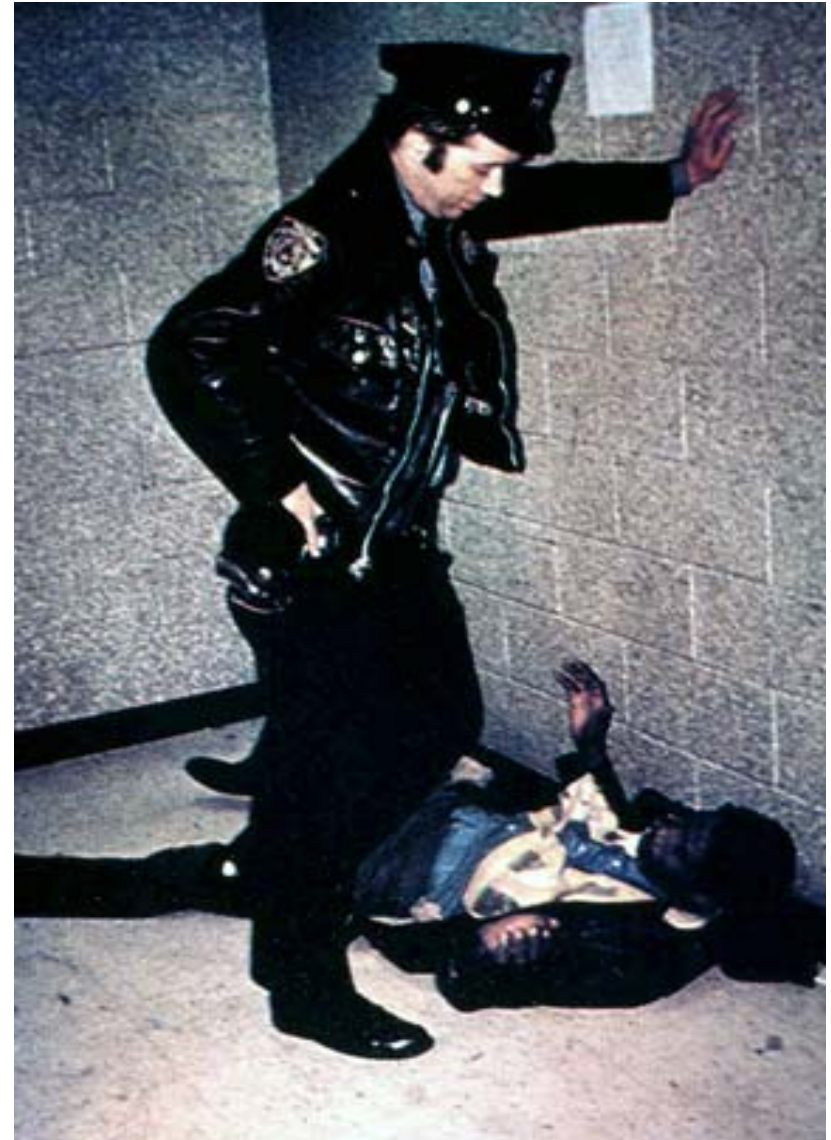
For profits to be high, wages must be low, requiring a surplus pool of labour to keep wages down. Growth therefore requires high unemployment in order to attract investment. In addition, prices must be kept high which requires consumption to exceed production. This in turn requires the continual creation of a state of desire through the establishment of a more or less permanent system of scarcity - which, of course is supported by the low wages and high unemployment of the workers. This process is accentuated by the global mobility of capital, which allows transnational companies to locate production in countries where wages are historically pitiful, and where Trade Unions are repressed. The International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank (both controlled by Western political systems) then require repressive economic policies of (3rd World) countries as a condition of development loans - ensuring that the poor stay poor and that exploitative Western companies continue to enjoy privileged production conditions and high profits.

MAINTAINING SOCIAL ORDER

Throughout the world, the people most affected by these conditions are the already-poor, ethnic minorities and indigenous people. All people of colour and ethnic minorities have systemic experience of police harassment and brutality. Recent high profile cases in Los Angeles and elsewhere only serve to indicate that such instances are not unique but are part of a pattern of institutionalised oppression that has continued from the 15th Century down to the present. The repression is specifically aimed at the unemployed and low-paid, because it is they who must be coerced into accepting the economic restrictions that support high profits.

In addition, to encourage investment, nation states must reduce the risks by providing a stable social environment. To do this simultaneously with unemployment creation and Trade Union repression requires repressive measures.

In order to maintain social order in the face of mounting opposition to these austere economic circumstances and policies, the State must continually increase its spending on “Law and Order” - that is, social control. At home the (US) Government spends more money on police, prisons and the “Justice” system. In all of the leading developed countries in the Western World, (including New Zealand) the number of prison inmates is the highest ever recorded. Expenditure on new prisons is at an all-time high.



POVERTY CREATION

Capitalist mythologies maintain that there is no essential relationship between wealth and poverty, that within the free-market it is possible to create wealth without a cost to anyone, that the creation of wealth is a personal achievement with no negative consequences. Against this, Socialists note that the creation of wealth *requires* the creation of a corresponding poverty. That under Capitalism, the creation of poverty is an essential prerequisite for the creation of wealth, that unemployment and low wages are a necessary part of high profits, and are *created* to maintain investment and production.



The two photographs were taken less than 100 metres apart in the Financial District of San Francisco - one of the wealthiest cities in the World. On the left is the landscaped seating area to serve the lunching executives. Above, an unemployed mother of three whose sign reads, "HARD TIMES!"

THE FREE MARKET

The promotion of a Global (Free Market) Economy continues the process of colonisation down to the present. It is aimed at providing multi-national companies with the conditions for increased profit creation. It is theorised that by reducing corporate or business taxes, investment will be stimulated, thus creating jobs and improving the economic well-being of the general public. The major question for minorities or indigenous peoples is precisely *what kinds of jobs are created?* For them, the answer is usually jobs at the lower end of the economic scale. Furthermore, in order to increase profits, it is important to have cheaper labour, so that workers are paid less. For workers to accept this, there has to be a large surplus of available labour, so that demand for work exceeds supply. This requires a large pool of unemployed as a prerequisite for higher profits. It also requires massive investments in roads, electricity generation etc, which requires major overseas borrowing - placing the country in debt and requiring increased personal taxation. Multi-national companies threaten to take their business elsewhere unless governments comply with their needs. The imposition of Democracy in today's American Empire closely parallels the imposition of Christianity in the past. Its purpose is not, as stated, to free the people from tyranny, but to open up new markets that have accepted Western values and tastes for the further accumulation of Western capital, and the imposition of western-style economies at a Global level.



TRICKLE DOWN THEORY

The myth of the free-market global economy is that this profits will eventually "trickle down" to the poor. But because the multinational companies are based elsewhere, and have the power to insist on reduced taxation, lower wages and so on, they actually bleed the local economy of its economic resources, making the rich richer (relatively) and the poor poorer. Major demonstrations have taken place at all of the G7 meetings of the world economic leaders who are promoting the free market. Most adversely affected by the free market are indigenous peoples because their property rights (real and intellectual) have not been protected by Treaties from appropriation by others. Nor do they usually have a strong voice to prevent their governments buying into the market

Cut taxes on the rich. Curb state benefits for the poor. The rich will produce more. The poor will price themselves into jobs. Result: less poverty.

So ran the trickle-down approach to poverty embraced by the Conservatives from 1979 on. Hence ministerial embarrassment when, on June 30, their own Social Security Department published figures which suggested that the theory is not working.

The survey ("Households Below Average Income 1979 to 1990-91") showed a dramatic fall in the share of total incomes going to the worst-off 10 per cent of households from 4.0 per cent to 2.1 per cent.

At the other end of the spectrum, the number of households on more than £600 (\$1600) a week (at 1993 prices) rose nine-fold, from 230,000 to 2.1 million.

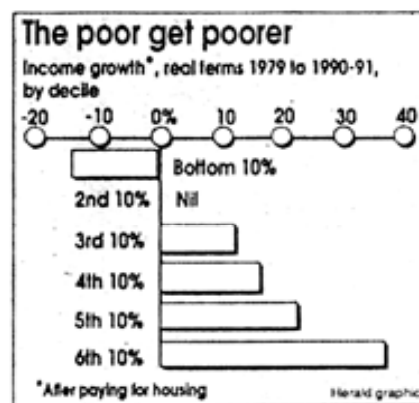
This could still have been consistent with the trickle-down theory, provided the poor were better-off than they were before.

Unfortunately, they are not. Average incomes rose by 35 per cent in real terms. But the poor missed out entirely.

The incomes of the bottom 10 per cent actually fell, by 14 per cent after they had paid their housing costs. In other words, the poor have got poorer.

Or so it seems. Mr Peter Lilley, the Thatcherite Social Security Secretary, denies it. He makes three points.

● Despite their lower incomes, the poor have more consumer durables than they did in 1979: 69 per cent now have central heating, compared with 29 per cent in 1979; 73 per cent have telephones, compared with 47 per cent then; 49 per cent



cars, compared with 39 per cent in 1979.

● The figures include the self-employed, who often report (for fear of the tax authorities?) low or zero incomes. Their

number has grown greatly since 1979.

● Though the share of total incomes of the poorest 10 per cent has fallen, this does not mean that the same people have got poorer. The makeup of the bottom 10 per cent is changing. In 1979, it consisted mostly of families on state income support. The value of income support has gone up by 15 per cent since 1979, and many on benefits do not now figure among the poorest 10 per cent of households.

Their place, runs the Lilley argument, has been taken by the new poor. Typically, they are families who bought an expensive house in the mid-1980s. They were clobbered by high mortgage rates in the late 1980s.

Many then lost their jobs in the recession. As mortgage rates come down, and recovery cuts unemployment, their pov-

erty may prove temporary.

This is a good try by Mr Lilley; but not good enough. Even excluding the self-employed, the bottom 10 per cent of households were 6 per cent worse off.

And even if housing costs are left out, to avoid the distortions caused by the newly unemployed with big mortgages, the incomes of the worst-off fell by 1 per cent.

Paul Gregg and Stephen Machin have compared inequality in various countries. They show (in a book, *Is the UK Labour Market Different?*, to be published in December) that in the 1980s Britain leapfrogged over other west European countries in the inequality league. In Italy, for example, inequality may even have fallen.

The worst for the poor of Britain may not be over. Weaker unions and the abolition of wages councils are likely to mean lower pay for the poor.

Greater flexibility of labour markets is increasing the number of (non-poor) two-earner households, but also that of no-earner households as full-time jobs disappear.

Mr Lilley is under pressure from the Treasury to spend less on benefits.

The European Community defines as poor anyone earning less than half the Community average. On that definition, the number of poor Britons increased from five million in 1979 to some 12 million now, according to research by Britain's Low Pay Unit.

One in four poor west Europeans is now British.

Less miseries?

London Britons ought to be singing and dancing in the streets this summer: the "misery index," an indicator of overall economic performance, has just hit a 26-year low.

This index, invented by the late Arthur Okun, an American economist, is the sum of the inflation rate and the unemployment rate. The higher the score, the more miserable people are assumed to be.

In May, Britain's inflation rate was 1.3 per cent, its unemployment rate 10.4 per cent. Adding these together gives a misery index of 11.7 per cent, down from a recent peak of 17 per cent (16.9 per cent inflation, 6.1 per cent unemployment) in October 1990, the month

before Mr Major took over as Prime Minister, and well below its all-time high of 30.2 per cent in 1975 (26.9 per cent inflation, 3.3 per cent unemployment). Indeed, Britain's misery score is at its lowest level since 1973.

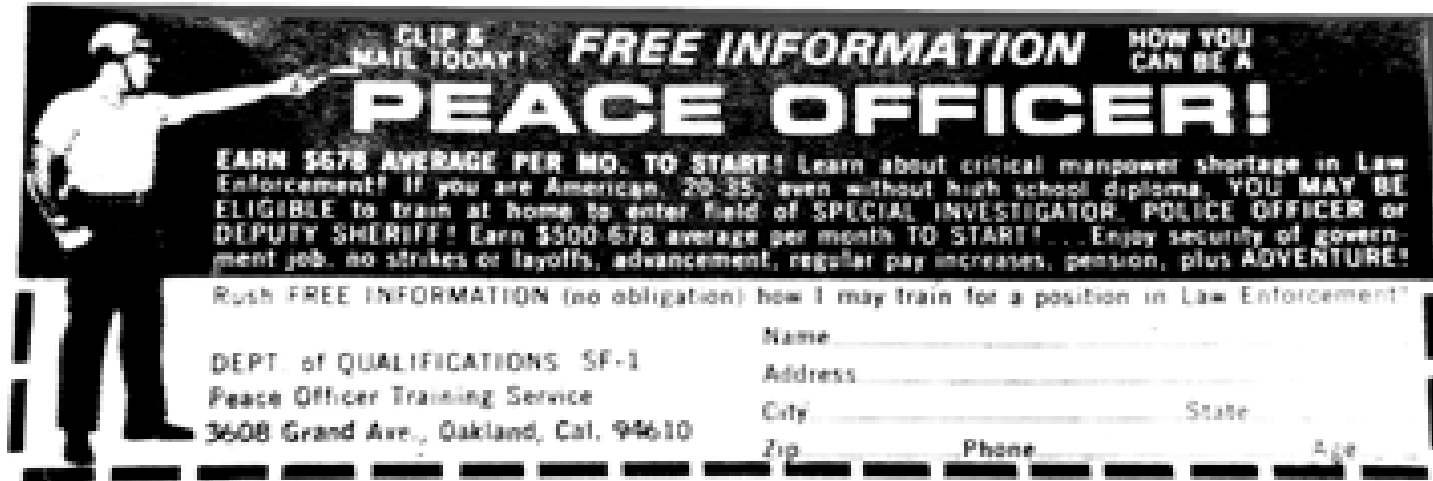
So why all the glum faces? A big flaw with the crude misery index is that it implies that a one-point rise in unemployment is no nastier than a one-point rise in inflation. We tried giving double the weight to unemployment, to reflect more closely today's balance of concern.

This alternative misery index has barely fallen under Mr Major and remains high compared with the late 1980s.

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Recruitment of law enforcement personnel also increases, and with high unemployment, the number of poor available for this work helps to maintain a relatively low-wage workforce in the military and law enforcement agencies. Advertising in the public media becomes increasingly vivid and often farcical appealing to those elements of violence that are emerging in the frustrated high-unemployment culture . The irony of maintaining peace at the point of a gun seems to have eluded this advertising agency. Nevertheless, the subtext of the image is clearly one of social control in an environment of danger and violence - conditions created and exacerbated by the economic disparities created by government policies intent on maintaining low wages brought about in part by an adherence to the ideology of the free market which supports and enhances the global mobility of capital .

MILITARY SPENDING

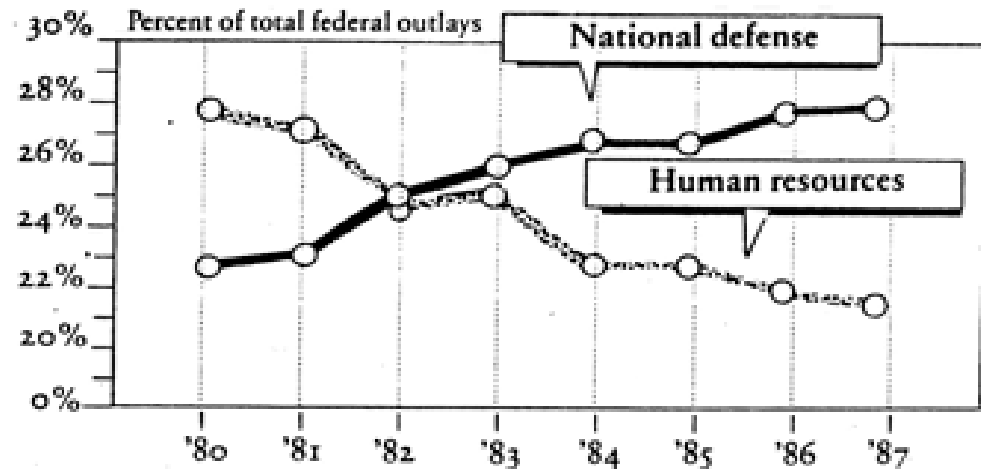
At the same time that it is spending increasing amounts on domestic social control, through increased recruitment the State is also required to spend much more on its global hegemony, to ensure the safety and property interests of its own multi-nationals overseas, and to also ensure the continuing availability of cheap natural resources and labour for its industries. The most typical recent example has been the United States invasion of Iraq and its threatened military intervention in Iran, to ensure continuing US access and ownership of Middle East oil resources.

The chart on the right shows the changes (inversion) in Human Resource and military spending in the USA under Ronald Reagan. This was a time of unprecedented unemployment and homelessness, with more than 10 million homeless people living on the streets of the wealthiest nation on the planet.

CHANGING 1980s FEDERAL BUDGET PRIORITIES

Defense vs. human resources

Here is a comparison between the amount spent during the Reagan years on national defense and the amount spent on what the Office of Management and Budget calls "human resources" (excluding Social Security and Medicare).



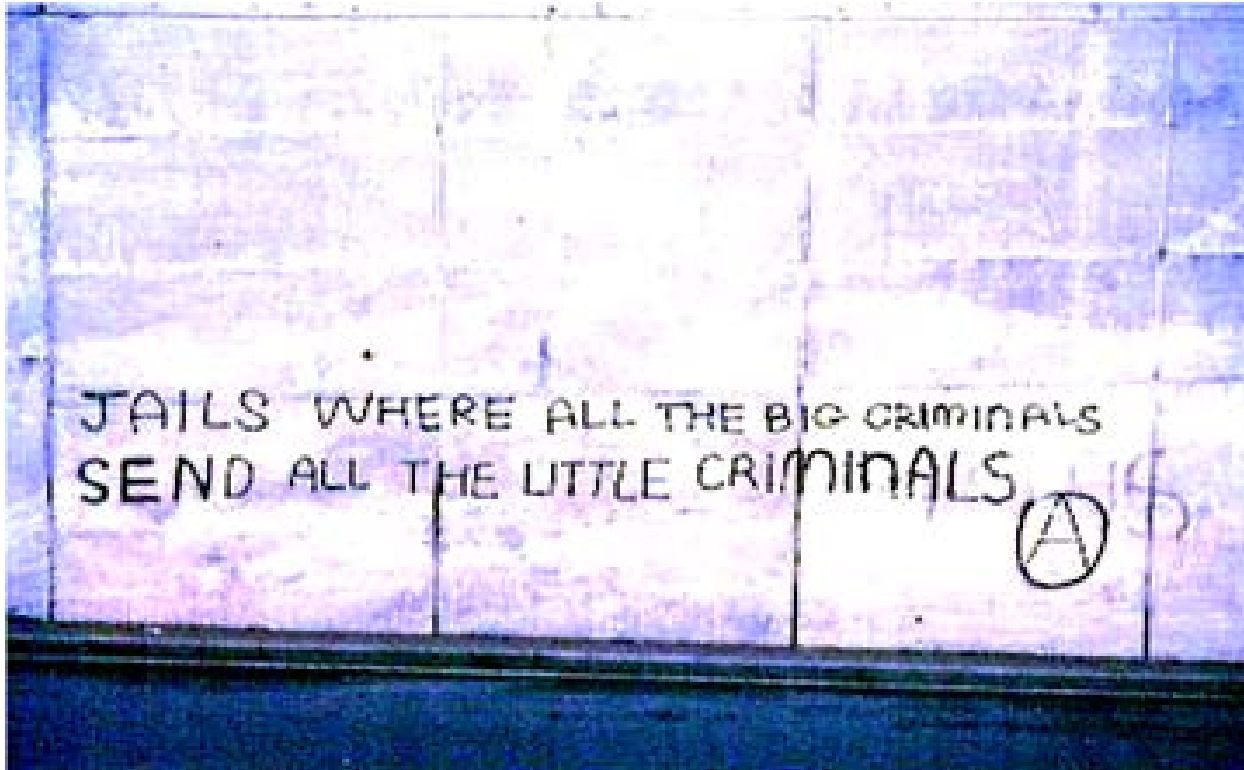
Just as unemployment increases in the private sector, so do employment opportunities become increasingly available in the military and the police forces. So it is, that once again, it is predominantly the poor and working class are sent into armed conflict with their counterparts both at home and abroad. The sons of the wealthy are rarely the victims of Empire's global hegemony.

PROGRESS



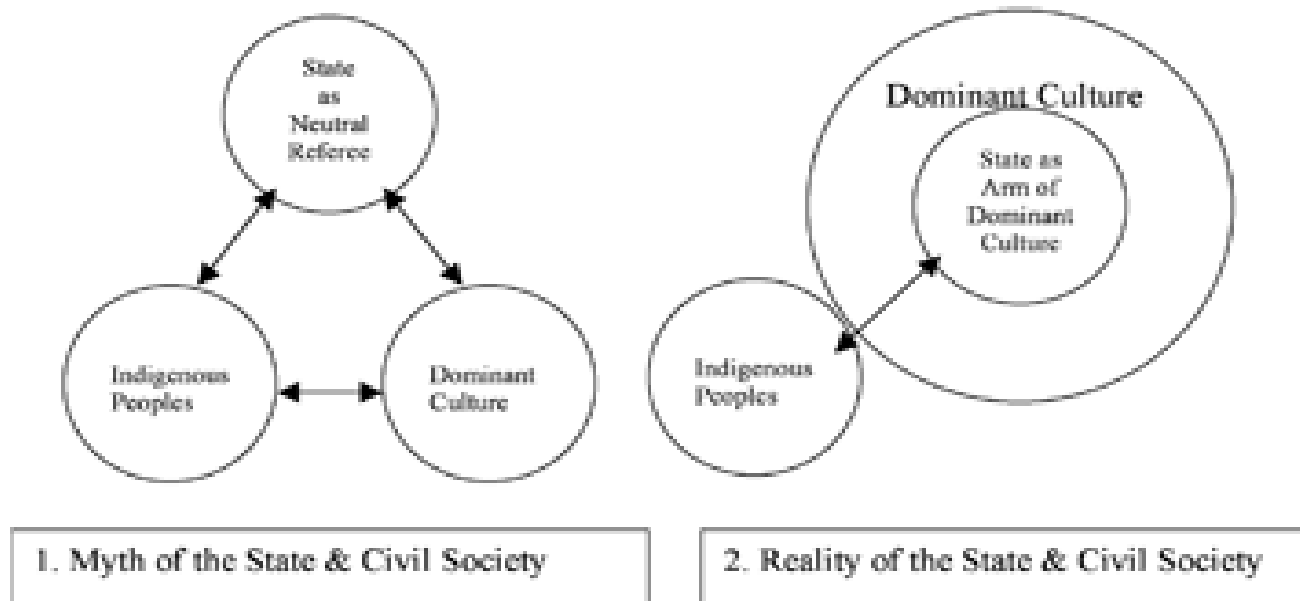
In the 1990s in America, the increased privatisation of the the public domain and increased militarism was attributed to the need to conquer communism. Anti-Communism had animated U.S. domestic and foreign policy since the second World War and had reached its most rabid form in the McCarthyism of the 1950s and the Cold War of the 1960s. More generally, oppression, colonisation and dispossession are attributed to the necessity for *progress* - to the striving for a “better tomorrow”. Looking back over history, it is difficult not to ask “better for whom?” When one nation controls more than 50% of planetary resources, while increasing millions drop below poverty indices or die of starvation, while resources (of which there actually *are* enough to go around) are squandered in further arms build-up it is difficult not to conclude that tomorrow_s progress is today_s oppression.

CRIMINALITY????



In all of this, the question arises, “Who are the real criminals” Critical theorists go further. They ask, “Who defines criminality? It is never the poor! Hence white-collar or corporate crime is dealt with much more leniently in the courts, although it may have a much deeper and wider social impact. Criminality is defined through the law, the Courts and Parliament. These are the agencies of the State. The State defines criminality, and its definition is framed by the needs of the dominant culture. Chief amongst its criteria is the protection of *private* property, which is the lynchpin of Capitalism. The concept of private property was developed in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries and is inimical to the value systems of almost all indigenous peoples

NEUTRAL STATE?



The prevailing belief is that the State operates in the interests of the whole of society, acting as a neutral referee between competing social and cultural groups. This belief is not backed up by a critical look at history. It is a socially constructed myth. Rather, the State is not a *neutral* entity, but is the arm and instrument of the dominant culture. It's role is to maintain dominant cultural power by maintaining the myth of neutrality. The myth serves to delude the people into compliance with the constitutional framework (the Law) which has been initiated and shaped by the dominant culture itself. Its agencies are headed by the elite, its values are the values of the elite and its practices most benefit the elite. This is most evident in countries that have been colonised, like New Zealand, Australia, Canada and the Americas, where the dominant culture equates most closely with the elite colonising culture., and where the original inhabitants are the most marginalised and excluded. Here, constitutional forms have been designed specifically to strip the indigenous of their productive capacity and their ability to resist.

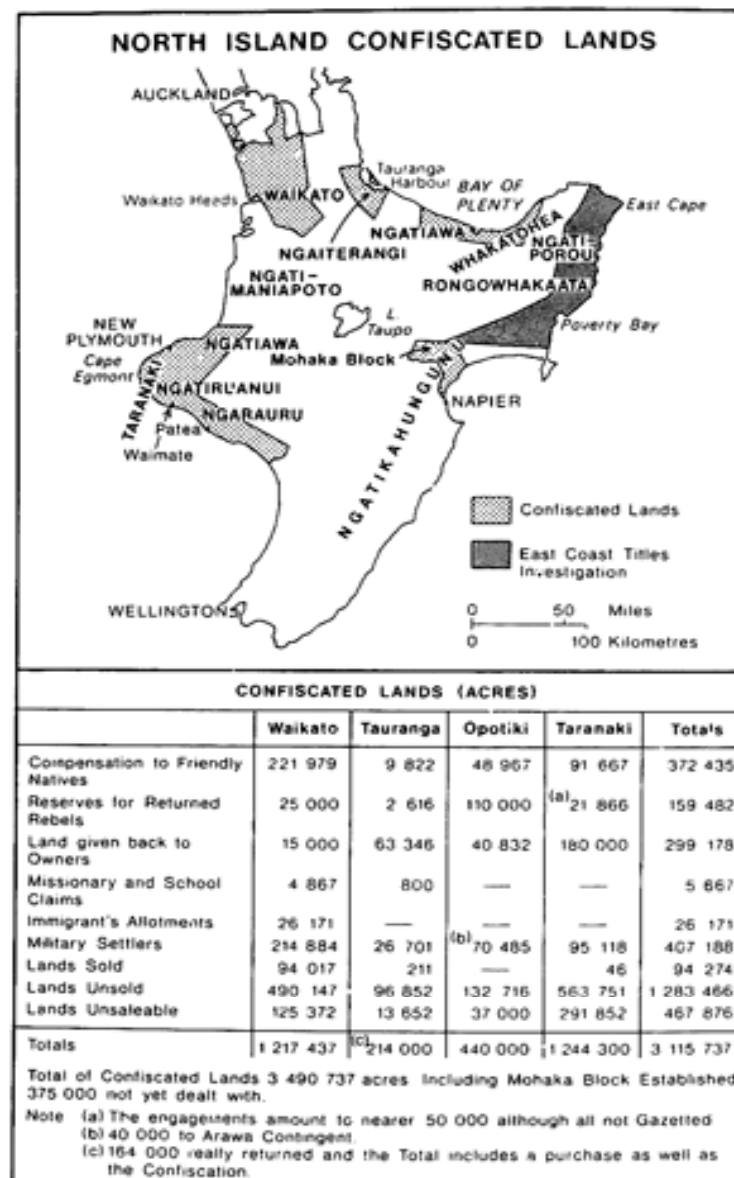
A NEW ZEALAND EXAMPLE

In New Zealand, for instance, the State has continually made and changed laws that benefit to colonising European culture and penalises Maori, the *tangata whenua*. This is true whether we look at issues of

- Land confiscations
- Educational funding
- Curriculum development
- Language protection etc.
- Parliamentary legislation

This is because the dominant pakeha culture and the tangata whenua have two different constitutional realities. Maori believe that the Treaty of Waitangi established a *partnership*. The Crown believes that it established a *system of control*. Its intended control was already inscribed in the 1840 Treaty, where the English version specifically omits to mention the surrender of *Rangitiratanga* (Chiefly Authority), only *Kawanatanga* (Governance).

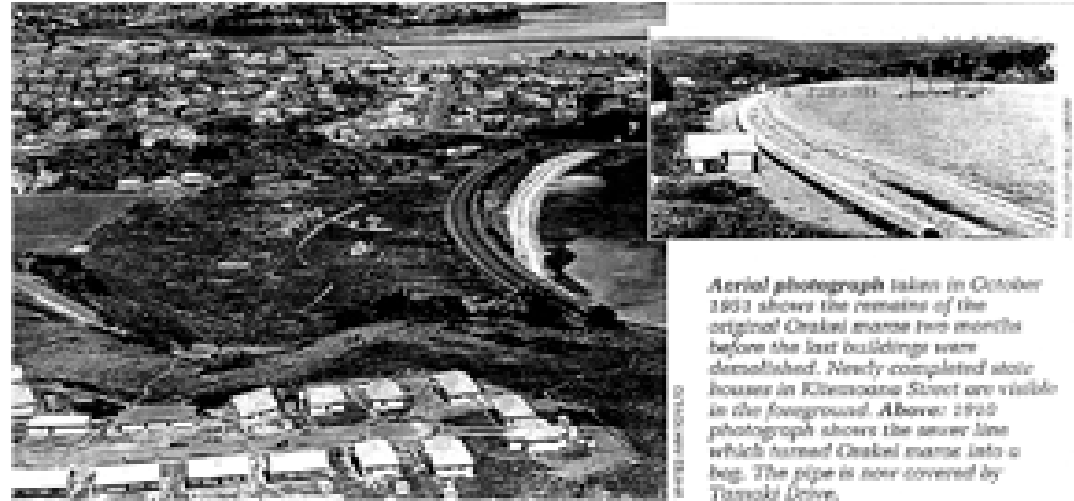
It would be comforting to think that all of these examples were *historical*. But the colonisation persists. Recently, in Education, just when Maori are beginning to access tertiary study in unprecedented numbers, the Crown has changed the funding system to stem the flow. And just when the Courts found that Maori might have a case to present in their quest for recognition of Native Title over the foreshore and seabed, the Government stepped in to prevent further access to the legal system and to pass legislation that alienated the land for ever - a modern Confiscation.



THE COMMON GOOD

The pretext for the confiscation of the Foreshore and Seabed was the preservation of “the common good” - guaranteed public access to New Zealand’s beaches and foreshore. But restriction on public access had never been sought by Maori, and in fact they had indicated their willingness to guarantee such access themselves in the event that their claims were met.

Such recourse to “the common good” is a key strategy in the “democratic” oppression of all minorities. In New Zealand, the record of State oppression of Maori is well documented.



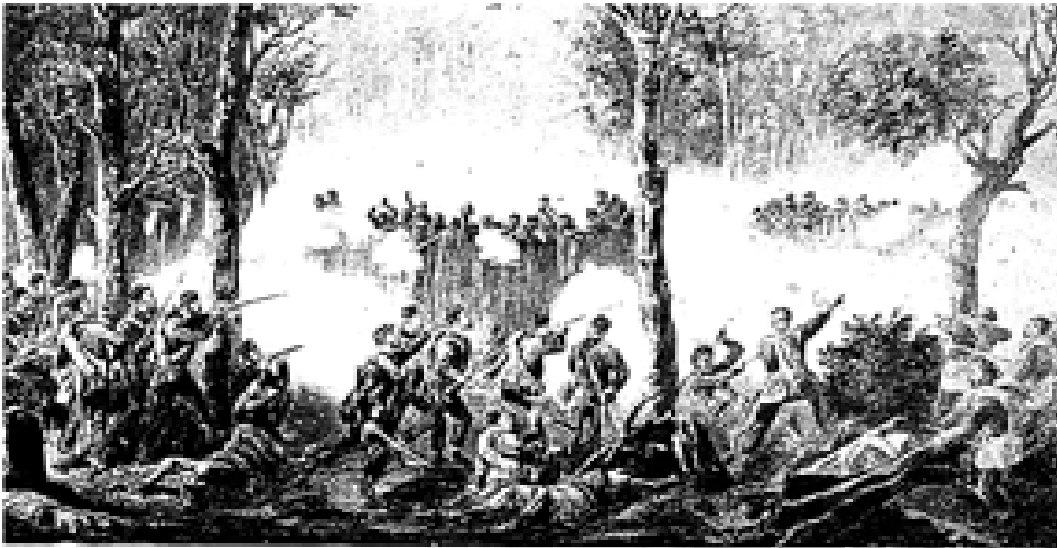
Aerial photograph taken in October 1952 shows the remains of the original Orakei marae two months before the last buildings were demolished. Newly completed stone houses in Kōwhiri Street are visible in the foreground. Above: 1952 photograph shows the sewer line which turned Orakei marae into a bog. The pipe is now covered by Tamaki Drive.

- The institution of the Maori seats in Parliament to *prevent* the advent of a majority of Maori MPs since seats were tied to land ownership title and increasing numbers of Maori were beginning to attain individual title to their land.
- The original land confiscations (and the subsequent and ironic transformation of Maori Education to produce farm workers to serve on the farms they had once owned).
- The eviction of Ngati Whatua from Orakei Marae to remove “the eyesore” for the Queen’s ceremonial drive along Tamaki drive in 1952.

In the latest developments in Education, the government has limited the number of possible Wananga to three, largely to protect the status of the Universities. When, in 2005, it became clear that the Wananga were hugely successful at encouraging Maori into tertiary study (something successive governments had said was needed for fifty years), they moved to restrict their growth by changing funding criteria “in the common (economic) good”. In all of this, the crown has maintained that its actions are for the “common good” - while the *reality*, from a Maori perspective, is that legislation has always been for the coloniser’s good, at the expense of the tangata whenua.

WRITING HISTORY

In the writing of history to favour the victors, every sphere of knowledge is brought into play - Science, Art, the Humanities etc. In the process of colonisation and dispossession Anthropology was used to emphasise the superiority of the colonising culture, Science was used to measure this superiority through Eugenics, the Law was used (and still is!) to legalise confiscations and disposessions, the Church was used to impose alien cosmologies, the Press was used (and still is!) to vilify and dehumanise the colonised as in this cartoon (right) from the Taranaki Punch of 1860. And Art was used to romanticise the process of oppression as in this painting (below) by British military artist Orlando Norie, depicting the 14th Foot Waikato Pa attack in 1863 as rebel-punishment.



THE SETTLER'S LAMENT.

Tune—"She wore a wreath of roses."

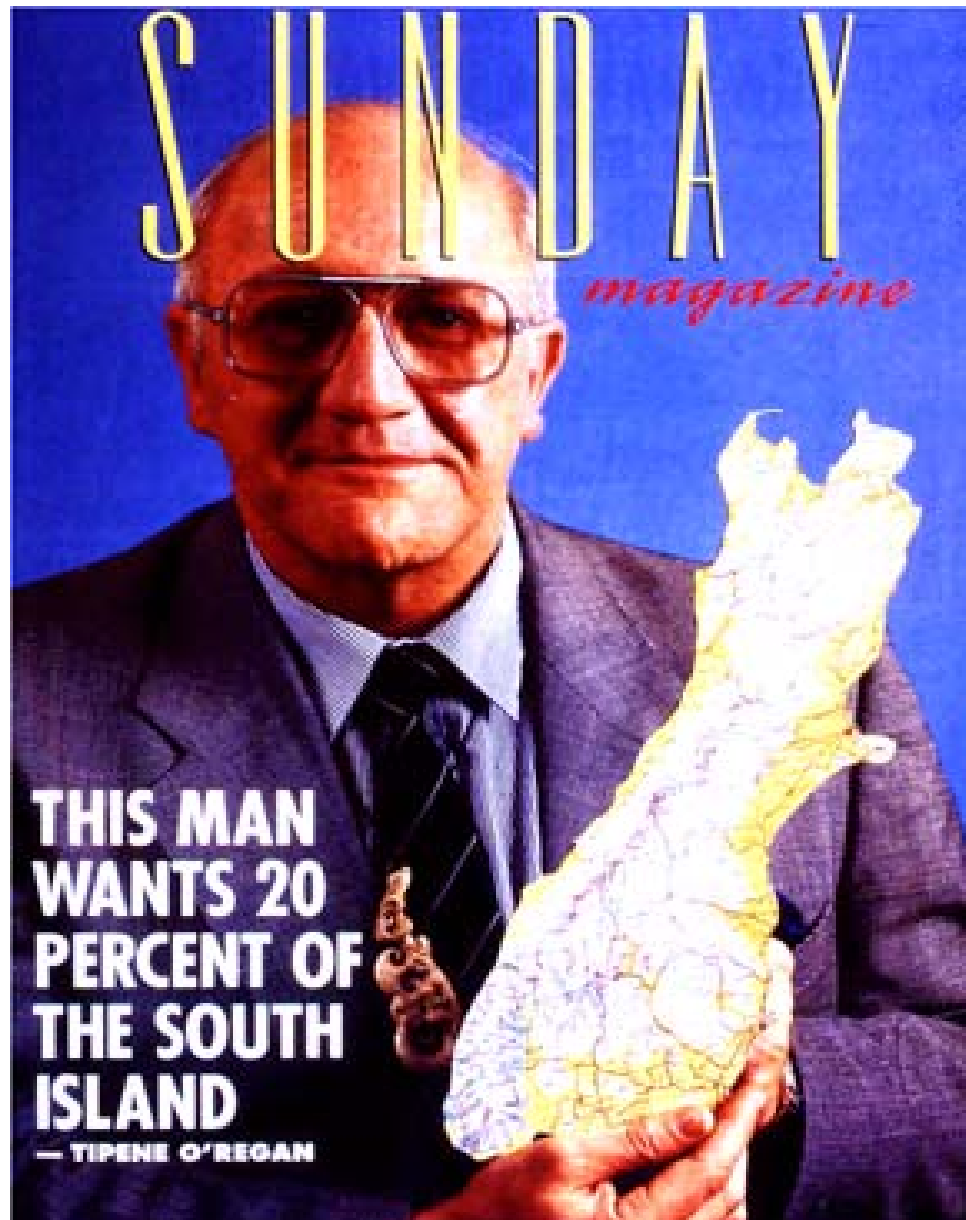
He wore a filthy blanket on the day when first we met,
And held between his dirty teeth, a pipe as black as jet;
His footsteps had a lightness, and his voice a fiendish tone:
He was thinking of the plunder, when we were gone to town.
I saw him but a moment, but methinks I see him now,
With his tattooed face, and matted hair all hanging o'er his brow.

A bunch of parrot's feathers, when next we met, he wore,
Th' expression of his features was more fiendish than before;
And struggling by his side was one, who strove, and not in vain,
To jam the bayonet 'twixt his ribs, with all his might and main.
I saw him but a moment, but methinks I see him now,
With a scowl of baffled hatred upon his ugly brow.

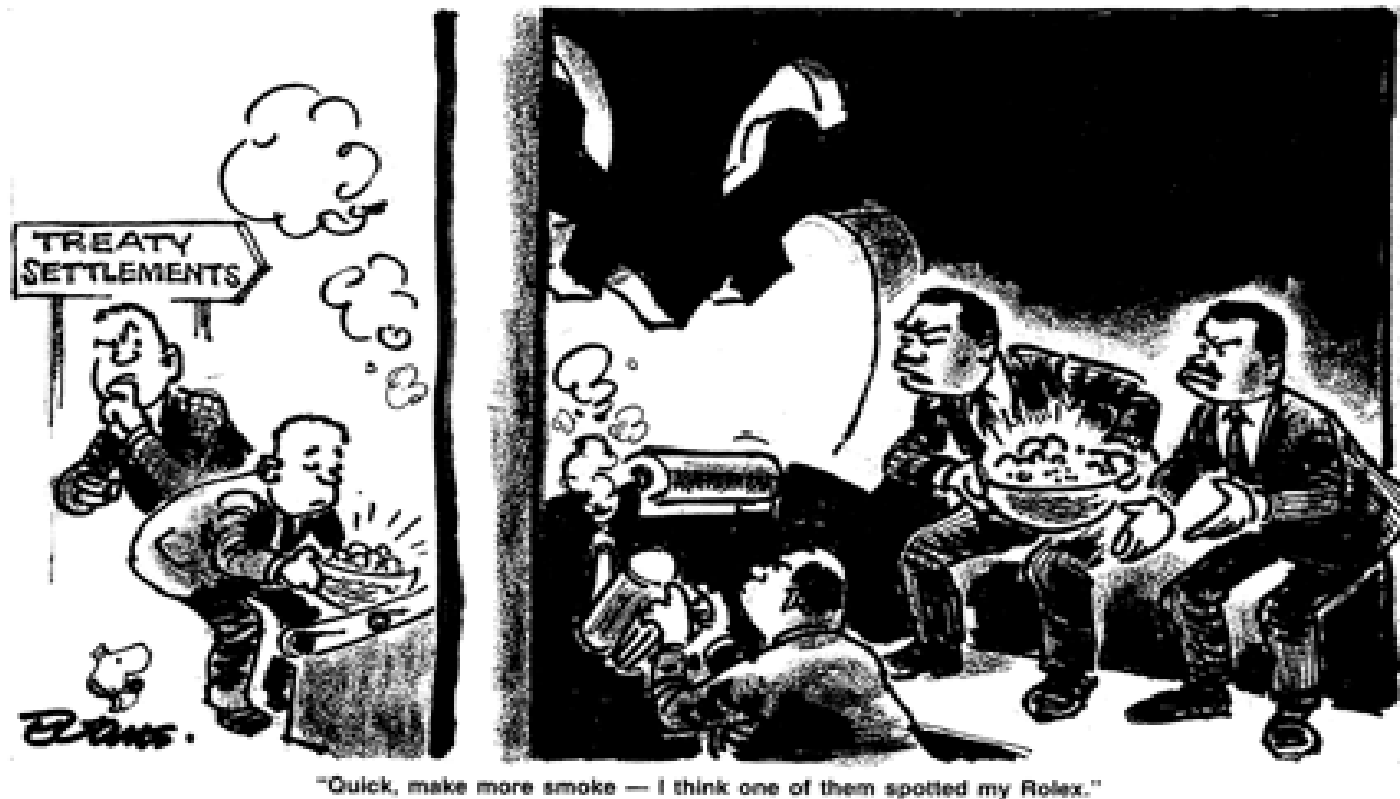
And once again I saw that form, no feathers in his hair,
The life was quite departed, still in death the scowl was there:
In a well-filled hole they threw him, and there was no one near,
To hold the doleful *tangi*, or shed for him a tear.
I saw him but a moment, I would like them all so now,
In a large hole to be buried with the scowl upon their brow.

CIVIL SOCIETY

Properly speaking, the State is that agency that has control over the constitutional forms by which society is structured and shaped - the Government. It controls the Armed Services and the Police by which it attempts to “maintain social order”. These it uses only as a last resort, when its capacity to restrain and *persuade* has been diminished or eroded. The use of the police or armed services is a sign of *hegemonic failure*. Preferably, the State can rely upon Civil Society to maintain its control - those public and private agencies that shape public opinion through communication - in this case, the media, portraying Tipene O'Regan as either an unrealistic dreamer or a greedy land-grabber. Lost in this cover, is any mention of the loss of *mana whenua* experienced by generations of Ngai Tahu. Media coverage of Maori demands invariably portray them as *unreasonable*,



TREATY SETTLEMENTS



Because the *official* History of New Zealand has been written by the Crown and its racist supporters, and because this history has been disseminated throughout the schools and media of the Nation, most New Zealanders are woefully unaware of the *actual* acts of oppression that were committed by the State on Maori. It is therefore easy to portray claims by Maori through the Treaty settlement process as both greedy and unreasonable, and the media is only too willing to support this process with its own racist characterisations of Maori claimants. In this sense, the oppression is not only *historical* but continues down into the present.

BLAMING THE VICTIM



All of this boils down to what sociologist William Ryan has called *blaming the victim*. If the victims of oppression can be convinced that *it is their own fault*, then their resistance to further oppression can be cut off at the source. The victims are doubly victimised by being made to feel inadequate in their inability to maintain their health and independence in the face of overwhelming oppression. This was particularly so with the confiscations, which deprived Maori of their productive capacity and reduced them to abject dependency on the State - for which they are now accused of being dole bludgers, lazy, incompetent, lacking in entrepreneurial skills and/or industry. One has to ask the question of where Maori might now stand, economically, socially and politically, had the confiscations never occurred, and if the wealth that their confiscated land has since produced had flowed instead into the Maori economy. Blaming the victim is a way of trying to make the victim feel responsible for their own plight, their victimisation. If they feel responsible for their situation the oppressed are less likely to recognise the true role of the oppressor.

NAMING/LEGITIMATING:

All the concepts, theories and meanings that shape our lives are socially constructed. This is to say that ideas and things don't have meanings in and of themselves but only those meanings that are given or ascribed. The power to give meaning - to *name* - is one of the most powerful powers that exists because it shapes all of our views and beliefs about the nature of the world. This power, the power to name is not evenly distributed across society. Some individuals or organisations have almost all of the power, which they exercise through Education, the Media, the Law, and so forth. Education is a very powerful agency in the social construction of meaning. A related power to *naming* is the power to *legitimate*.



Of all the knowledge available in the world, only a small proportion is viewed as significantly valuable to society and culture to be included in curricula, published, displayed in museums and galleries etc. A great deal of knowledge is excluded from this kind of public recognition. Knowledge that *is* included is said to have been *legitimated*. Usually, Universities play a key role in the process of knowledge legitimation, because they have been able to establish an erroneous reputation for being ideologically-free. But the power of naming and legitimating is inherent in the entire educational system, and is most noticeable in the area of *curriculum*. The power to determine what goes into an educational curriculum and what is left out is enormous. Those aspects of knowledge that are left out or remain unspoken or unvoiced become *invisible* in society at large. It is as though they do not exist.

ALIENATION



As the system progresses, people become increasingly alienated from the processes that govern them, and the latter become increasingly faceless and remote. In the process, self-esteem diminishes and people also become alienated from their own creative capacities. They become less able to empathise, to experience compassion and love. Dependency, hopelessness and despondency begin to predominate. The State, for its own part increasingly insensitive to the needs of its community, maintains that it is working to improve conditions for all of its citizens, while at the same time effecting policies which discriminate most severely against the poor and helpless. It is in this context, that critical Education Theory has so much to offer. Critical Education aims to politicise, conscientise and activate the people to recognise the circumstances of their subordination and to actively struggle to transform their world.

ORGANIC INTELLECTUALS

Through all of this struggle, it might appear that the dominant culture exerts irresistible power to subvert the dreams and expectations of the oppressed. They own the media, they have powerful influence in Law and Government, they control the resources and means of production and they shape what can be known through Education. But their hegemony is never complete. The oppressed persistently refuse to remain oppressed and their struggle for emancipation and social transformation is constant. Often, they put their faith in Democratic leaders, only to be disappointed when these politicians later change their positions to remain in power. It remains, then to those whom Gramsci has called *Organic Intellectuals* to offer guidance in the struggle for self-determination. Gramsci suggests that nearly all intellectuals in the world live in a moral and political vacuum. If they ever had social concerns they have given up for the status of their social positions. Organic Intellectuals, on the other hand, are those intellectuals who come from oppressed cultures, who have educated themselves politically, socially and culturally, but who have retained their connection to their roots - to the need and desire for freedom for all. Such ones are rare, and are deeply loved by the people they serve. They are characterised by their internal consistency. They walk their talk. Theirs is not necessarily the path of armed revolution like Che Guevara (centre). They can be pacifist like Mahatma Ghandi (right) or Martin Luther King (left), Eva Rickard (centre left) or Te Whiti o Rongomai (centre right). But what they all share, is that they are *Activists*. They do more than theorise. They also engage in *praxis* - that is, putting their theories into practice in their own lives and in the wider world.



PRAXIS

In Critical Theory, this usually refers to the relationship between Theory and Practice and how they are mutually dependent and how they inform each other. Both Gramsci and Freire have theorised extensively about the relationship between theory and action. Gramsci spoke of the relationship between the feeling masses and the thinking elite, and the need for them to work in close co-operation with each other towards their mutual emancipation - of the need for an integration of both thinking and feeling in the development of a transformative process. But change comes not simply by either thinking or feeling or through their combination, but through a relationship between theory and practice - *praxis*. Giroux, amongst others, has critiqued Gramsci's reasoning, and has suggested that *everyone* thinks - not just "intellectuals". Thinking, for Giroux, is not a special activity, but one that is woven into our everyday lives. What is at stake is not *if* we think, but *how* we think. Critical thinking becomes an indispensable component of social change. Freire put it this way:

"... men's activity consists of action and reflection: it is praxis; it is transformation of the world. And as praxis it requires theory to illuminate it. Men's activity is theory and practice; it is reflection and action. It cannot be reduced to either verbalism or activism... a revolution is achieved with neither verbalism nor activism, but rather with praxis, that is, with reflection and action directed at the structures to be transformed. The revolutionary effort to transform these structures radically cannot designate its leaders as its *thinkers* and the oppressed as its *doers*."

Transformative praxis, then, is about connecting thinkers and doers to their mutual educational benefit. This means *in practice* eschewing or transcending class boundaries which define a distinction between manual and intellectual labour, and recognising that each is an essential component of social transformation. This means that educational projects that do not engage with real-world-transformation are counter-transformative.



"Hold on Professor"